



# Burnes/Burness Family of Montrose



by Iain D. McIntosh

The story of the origins of the Family of Robert Burns, their beginnings in the Mearns and the lives of the Montrose Cousins from 1745 to the 1850's



The Burnes Family of Montrose  
Members  
of  
Lodge St Peter No. 120



# The Burnes/Burness Family of Montrose

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**By Iain D. McIntosh**

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## *Introduction*

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This research project started through a sequence of unconnected pieces of information I had collected some years back when I was undertaking research into two current projects of the time, one was documenting and writing the early history of the Province of Forfarshire and the other was understanding the relationship that 18<sup>th</sup> century Freemasonry had with the Jacobites in the East of Scotland during the 1745 uprising.

For the early history of the Province of Forfarshire, I had come across the name of James Burnes, Master of St. Peter's Lodge, Montrose recorded in the earliest minute book of the Provincial Grand Lodge, as being the first Provincial Grand Secretary, and mentioned alongside his name – that '*he was a cousin of the poet*'.

To carry this research further into the background of this man, I obtained a loan of the earliest minute books of Lodge St. Peter No. 120 in Montrose (Chartered in 1765) and whilst searching through the earliest minute book I came across various references to other members of the 'Burnes' family, and their membership of St Peter's Lodge, along with that of Robert Burns' cousin – James Burnes himself.

The story of the Glenbervie/Montrose family of Burns is an interesting and intriguing one – a part of the Robert Burns story which is not so well known or even realised. The earliest beginnings of his fathers' side of the family, the Burnes/Burness branch was in the farming area of the 'Mearns' area of North East Scotland, just inland from Dunnottar, beginning around the Glenbervie region as farmers, their subsequent lives in the town of Montrose and then out to India in the days of the British Empire.

This story brings to life the uncles, aunts, and cousins of Robert Burns, and subsequent generations from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century down to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the tragic end of two of the Burnes brothers, killed in '*Kabool*', Afghanistan in 1841, the beginning of the first Anglo/Afghan War. A time when the British were beginning to take an interest in and trying to incorporate Afghanistan into the British Indian Empire, and of course encountering the warlike Afghans. Nearly 170 years later – has anything changed?

## The Mearns – home to the Burnes family.

Robert Burns was born on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of January in the year 1759. His original birth name was, as most Burns historians will know was ROBERT BURNES, the surname of his father William. Robert changed this spelling of his surname in 1786 and there is evidence of that fact in the minute books of Lodge St James in Tarbolton when his brother Gilbert joined the Lodge in March of that year and both he and Robert signed with the surname of Burns.

As Burns historians will already know, his father, William Burnes was not a native of Ayrshire, he was born on the other side of Scotland in the parish of Dunnottar not far from Stonehaven, in that part of Scotland known locally as the MEARN, and today it is within the administrative county of Aberdeenshire.



The rich beautiful farm lands of the Mearns where William was born is now more famous for its connections with another, more recent 20<sup>th</sup> century writer, that of Lewis Grassie Gibbon, creator of such works as *Sunset Song*, *Cloud Howe* and *Grey Granite*

(*A Scots Quair*) written in the rich, broad Doric language of the area. However, in previous centuries this was the home of the extended 'Burnes' Family. They were farming folk living mainly around the GLENBERVIE region. The name Burnes appears in 1547 when "*the lands were rented by persons named Burnes,*"

The family line can be traced back to Walter Burnes born at Bogjordan farm in 1615 his oldest son was William Burnes who died circa 1715. William married Christian Fotheringham (year of marriage unknown). Their youngest son was James Burnes, (born circa 1656 and died 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 1743), he married Margaret Falconer (born 1659 died, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1749) they became tenants of a farm at Brawlinmuir, for this farm James Burnes paid an annual rent equal to £300 sterling. According to tradition, he was a person of great shrewdness. He lived during a period when Highland freebooters made frequent incursions into Kincardineshire for cattle and other plunder. On one occasion, when these "Caterans", as they were called, were operating in his neighbourhood, he adopted the precaution of concealing his money in the nave of an old cart wheel which lay in a hole in front of his house. The aperture being plugged up, the robbers entered and left the house without suspecting the existence of the treasure they were treading upon.

James and Margaret were Robert Burns's Great Grandfather and Great Grandmother both are now buried in the beautiful and tranquil setting of the old graveyard in Glenbervie, alongside other members of the Burnes family.



## Inscriptions on the tombstones



J.B. (*James Burnes*) - Here under  
lys the body of James Burnes  
Who was tenant in  
Bralinmuir, who died ye 23 of  
January 1743 aged 87 years.

M.F. (*Margaret Falconer*) - Also  
the body of Margaret Falconer his  
spouse, who departed this life the  
28<sup>th</sup> of December 1749, aged 90  
years.

*'Although our bodys worms destroy – our reins consumed be,  
Yet in our flesh and with our eyes – Shall our Redeemer see.'*

Also buried in the grave is  
Thomas Burnes, son of the  
above, who departed this life  
June ye 8<sup>th</sup>, 1734, aged 29 years.  
Also his lawful and only  
daughter Margaret who  
departed this life March ye 24<sup>th</sup>,  
1741, aged 8 years



James Burnes and Margaret Falconer had 10 children, the oldest son, William took over the running of the farm at Brawlinmuir, James another son, rented Hawkill farm, and Robert the Grandfather of the poet rented the farm of Clochnahill, all these farms were in close proximity to each other in the Glenbervie district, and formerly part of the extensive estates of the Family of Keith, the Earl Marischals of Scotland. In 1715 the Earl was attainted for his support of the Royal House of Stuart during the Jacobite uprising of that year and their lands were seized by the Crown.

Robert Burnes (years of birth and death unknown) married Isobel Keith of Criggie in 1715 and they had 4 sons and 6 daughters. Their children were James (1717-1761), Robert (1719-1789), William (11<sup>th</sup> Nov.1721 – father of the future Robert Burns), Margaret (1723-?), Elspet (1725-?), Jean (1727-?), George (1729-?), Isobel (1730-?) and Mary (1732-?).

## Clochnahill Farm



At first, they rented the farm of Kinmonth in Glenbervie but later moved to the larger farm of Clochnahill. During their tenancy of that farm and with the help of neighbouring farmers, a school was built in the local village and a teacher supported.

Robert and his sons Robert junior and William (*future father to the poet*), found the farm very hard going encountering some very poor harvests, especially the winter and Spring of 1740-41 which was particularly terrible with late frosts continuing into late April, this

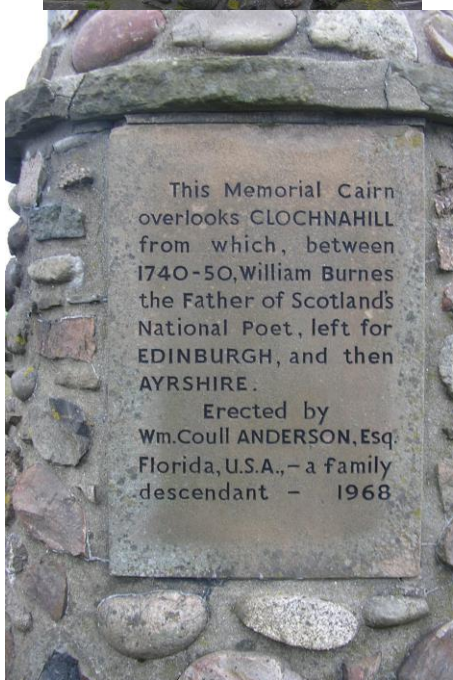
prevented the seed from being sown until late May and even then the rough and unseasonable weather which followed, stunted the crop so bad that it was almost useless.



They were faced with financial ruin and Robert senior finally gave up the farm sometime after 1740 and retired to a cottage in Denside to live with his three unmarried daughters. Around the same time his sons William (*father of Robert Burns*) and younger brother Robert left the area to seek other employment. Both journeyed south, William first to Edinburgh to work as a Market Gardener and then to Ayrshire to settle and raise a family the oldest of his sons becoming Scotland's National Poet, ROBERT BURNS. As to when William adopted the double 'ss' spelling of his name is uncertain (from *Burnes* to *Burness*).

William's older brother Robert moved down into England to become a gardener, but later in life he returned to live in Scotland, settled in Ayrshire dying in 1789.

However, to return to the siblings of William and Robert who remained in the Mearns area, to JAMES the oldest brother (1717-1761) and to sister ELSPET (date of baptism 18<sup>th</sup> Aug 1725, year of death unknown) and to the story of the MONTROSE family of Robert Burns. As there are so many JamesBurnes I have numbered them through the generations to help the reader with the family connections.





### **James Burnes [I] (1717 – 1761)**

James (1717 – 1761) (*uncle to the future Robert Burns*) was the oldest son of Robert Burnes and Isabella Keith, he moved from the family farm in Glenbervie in 1732 to the town of Montrose, becoming a merchant, town councillor and an Elder of the Church. He married Margaret Grubb by whom he had 4 sons and 4 daughters. John (1779 died in infancy), (James b1780), George (1781-1801), Anne (1783-1785), Christian (1785-1815), Elizabeth (1786-1818), Robert (1788-1790) and Sarah (1791-1814). However, James died at the early age of forty-four in July 1761.

It is known from existing letters that Gilbert Burns, brother to Robert corresponded with his uncle in Montrose exchanging information about the Ayrshire and Montrose families.

### **Elspet Burnes (1725-?)**

Elspet sister of James, William and Robert, married John Caird (29<sup>th</sup> August 1752) who is mentioned as being a Farmer at Denside of Dunnotter, a farm within walking distance of the Burnes Family at Clochnahill. Records show that Elspet was baptised on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 1725 however the dates for both her birth and death are, at the moment unknown.

**John Caird** (born c1721) is mentioned in a letter from Robert Burns (3<sup>rd</sup> August 1784) to his cousin James in Montrose (*James, son to above James*) he mentions that they had enjoyed the company of John Caird during his two-week stay in Ayrshire.

At some time, John and Elspet gave up the farm at Denside and like James moved down to the town of Montrose. John Caird is also mentioned in Masonic records as being a member of Lodge Montrose Kilwinning No. 15. In 1769 he is recorded on the Charter of Lodge St. Peter, Montrose as a founder member and founding Junior Warden of the new Lodge (*now No. 120 under the Scottish Constitution*). For many years John Caird was an active member of that Lodge and at various times during the early 1770's, held the offices of Junior Warden, Senior Warden and finally Treasurer. At the moment the date of his death is unknown.

*From the first Minute Book of Lodge St Peter, Montrose.*

*"To all and sundry, to whose knowledge these presents shall come, Greetings in God everlasting. Whereas upon application to the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons for the Kingdom of Scotland, by William Smith Esq. Of Torrat, Alexander Melvill, John Caird & Charles Strachan, members of the Ancient Lodge of Montrose & David Scott from St. Ninians at Brechin in their own name and in same of others residing in and about Montrose, setting furth that they were much concerned to promote the honour and interest of masonry in general and more particularly where they reside and being at a distance from their mother Lodges they were desirous to be by Charter from the Grand Lodge constitute into a regular Lodge by the style and title of Saint Peters Montrose and they propose the said William Smith Esq. For Master & Messrs Alex Melvill and John Caird for Wardens, Mr. David Scott for Treasurer & Mr. Charles Strachan Secretary....."*

### **James Burness [II] (1750 – 1837)**

The second son of James Burnes and Margaret Grubb was also named James (1750-1837). On the death of his father, James went and lived with his uncle William (*this is another William, he was a cousin to James, Robert, William and Elspet, this William is mentioned as a customs officer then a vintner in Montrose. In the Montrose records there is mention of a William Burnes, vintner, who had a 'dram' shop in the Red Lion Close, 25 High Street, circa 1780*), Sometime during this period James

seems to have adopted the double 's' in spelling his name, becoming for a while 'James Burness'. However, it also seems that later in life he reverted to the older, original spelling of 'Burnes'. Some of the other branches of the family retained the double 's' spelling and there are still many of the family line with the 'Burness' surname living in the Montrose area.

James was for many years, a Teacher in Montrose and later trained as a writer (*Solicitor*). He married Anne Greig, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1800 by whom he had 4 sons and 4 daughters. He was a various times Secretary to the local Forfarshire Farming Association, Depute Clerk of the Peace, and Clerk to the local Trades incorporations and a member of the local harbour committee.



James was the first cousin to Robert Burns the poet, who during his tour of the Highlands in 1787, stayed at the 'TURK O' HEAD' inn, an old Coaching Inn at the top of George Street in Montrose, this was the first and only time Robert Burns met his Montrose cousin.

The cousins corresponded with each other and it was to James that Robert Burns sent a tragic and urgent appeal in July 1796 for £10 to save him from the horrors of the Jail.

*'O, James! Did you know the pride of my heart, you would feel doubly for me! Alas I am not used to beg!... Forgive me for once more mentioning by return of post. Save me from the horrors of a jail!'*

Robert Burns had joined the local militia and had ordered a uniform to be made by the local tailor, Robert seemingly did not have the money to pay the bill and he appealed to his cousin in Montrose to help.

James sent the money, but it arrived just too late, Robert Burns had died. James sent a further £5 to Jean Armour, along with an offer to take their young son, Robert and to educate the boy with his own children in Montrose, a generous offer indeed but Jean would not part with any of her children. James Burnes died at Montrose on the 12th June 1837, aged eighty-seven and his remains were buried near those of his father, in the old burgh churchyard in Montrose.

### **Masonic Connections.**

James Burnes joined Lodge St Peter, Montrose on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1779 (probably proposed by his uncle William who had joined Lodge St Peter on the 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 1773. During this time James was living with his uncle), and most probably his other uncle John Caird may have also helped James join Lodge St Peter.

*Extract from Lodge St Peter Minute Book – 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 1773*

**William Burness**, Merchant in Montrose, having made the proper and requisite application to be admitted a member of this Lodge and being sufficiently recommended. He was accordingly regularly entered an apprentice in this Lodge and Brothers Robert Crabbe & Charles Strachan were appointed his instructors



The Lodge being duly constitute. Brother Robert Morton was recommended by the Rt Worshipful as an entered apprentice from new Edinburgh Kilwinning to be assumed a member of this Lodge and at same time for certain honorable reasons was passed and raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason.

**James Burness, School Master** was also properly recommended to be admitted to the first degree or entered apprentice part of masonry and for instructors was appointed Bro Wm Smith Esq., Bro David Scott & Bro John Ross

James became very active in Lodge St Peter, he became Secretary in 1780, Treasurer in 1784 and finally Master in 1791.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> Sept 1792 the Lodge, along with the two other Lodges in Montrose (Montrose Kilwinning, and Incorporated Kilwinning) gathered at the north side of the River Esk for the laying of the foundation stone of the first bridge over the river

*“The Lodge being met and duly constituted proceeded in proper form and due order to the place where the foundation stone of the Montrose Bridge was to be laid and after having formed a circle round the place, the foundation stone of that work of so great utility to the Town of Montrose was after the usual formalities and benediction laid by Mr (Bro) Ross of Rossie, David Scott, Esquire Dunonald? (sic) & Brother Thos Webster under the directions of the right Worshipful Master and Brother Alex Stevens the Architect amid the acclamations of great multitude. After which the Lodge returned, dined and spent the evening with the greatest festivity and harmony.*

*Signed James Burness, Master.”*

James Burness (*who had reverted to the Burnes spelling of his surname*) became the first Provincial Grand Secretary of Forfarshire in 1815 and compiled the first Minute book from 1815 to 1823.

### **James Burnes and the Provincial Grand Lodge of Forfarshire.**

The Province of Forfarshire had its documented beginnings in 1797 with George Paterson of Castle Huntly (*in the Carse of Gowrie, just east of Dundee*) as the first Provincial Grand Master he was then succeeded by William Maule, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Panmure in 1801.

The Provincial Grand Lodge as a Lodge in its own right was not formed until 1815 when Lord Panmure appointed his first office bearers with James Burnes (*cousin to the Poet*) as the first Provincial Grand Secretary.

*The first entry from the oldest Minute Book of the Provincial Grand Lodge. 1815 to 1823*

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*“At a Provincial Lodge of Freemasons of the County of Forfar held at Dundee on Monday the ninth day of October one thousand eight hundred and fifteen in consequence of a circular summonses issued by command of the Most Worshipful Provincial Grand Master of the County of Forfar requiring the attendance of the several Lodges this day.*

#### **Present**

*The Honorable William Maule of Panmure M.P. for the County of Forfar and Most Worshipful Provincial Grand Master.*

*The Right Worshipful, the Honourable Colonel John Ramsay, Provincial Senior Grand Warden.*

*The Right Worshipful Patrick Carnegie of Lower Esquire Provincial Junior Grand Warden.*

*The Right Worshipful James Burnes Master of St. Peters, Montrose, Provincial Grand Secretary.*

*The Right Worshipful and Reverend Heneage Horsley M.A. Oxon. Clergyman of the Episcopal Chapter at Dundee, Provincial Grand Chaplain."*

The first event recorded by James Burnes was the laying of the foundation stone of the new harbour of Dundee, designed by Thomas Telford, an event which attracted 'at least fifteen thousand spectators.' And included two thousand persons in the official procession.

### **William Maule, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Panmure**

William Maule, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Panmure, was the 2<sup>nd</sup> son of George 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Dalhousie (Grand Master Mason of Scotland 1765 – 1767) he was Provincial Grand Master of Forfarshire from 1801 until 1852, he was also Acting Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland 1808 – 1810 during the Grand Master-ship of George, the Prince of Wales.



Maule knew Robert Burns, there appears from the Burns Encyclopaedia, page 160 the following comment:

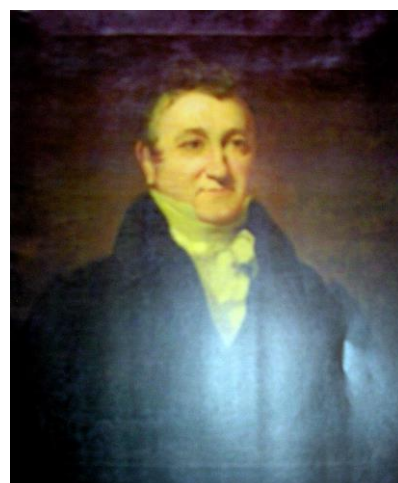
*"When Burns knew Maule, he was an officer in a regiment stationed at Dumfries. In a letter of 29<sup>th</sup> October 1794, Burns sent the epigram: 'To the Hon. Wm. R. Maule of Panmure', to Mrs. Dunlop." –*

"Thou fool, in thy phaeton towering,  
Art proud when that phaeton is prais'd?  
Tis the pride of a Thief's exhibition  
When higher his pillory's rais'd."

After the death of Robert Burns, Lord Panmure settled on Burns's widow, Jean Armour, a pension of fifty pounds, but he only had to disburse it for eighteen months, after which the son of Burns, James, was able to relieve him of the charge.

### **James Burnes [III] (1780 – 1852)**

Known locally in the town at that time as simply Provost Burnes, he married Elizabeth Glegg on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1800, she was the daughter of Adam Glegg a merchant burgher and former Provost of Montrose. They had nine sons and six daughters.



As a young man James was apprenticed to his father and studied law, becoming a solicitor. He became Dean of the Guildry incorporation and entered the town council as a councillor on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 1817, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1818, he was elected chief magistrate (Provost, the Scottish equivalent of 'Mayor'). After an interval of four years, he was again re-elected provost in September 1824 he left that office on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1825 and was appointed as a joint Town Clerk.

He had a deep interest in municipal affairs and exposed the abuses of the old burgh system whereby the old council elected the new council without any mandate or vote from the local citizens. He was described as 'a father of Scottish Burgh reform' when he supported the move for elected council members. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace (J.P.) for Forfarshire, this in recognition of his public services, it is said that 'he was held in high esteem for his upright conduct, his great humour, and generosity of disposition.'

James Burness owned a large house which stood in a street called the BOW BUTTS in Montrose. (This house still exists, though now in a very run down and dilapidated state.)

Of James's nine sons, five became active freemasons, three (James, Adam and David) were members of Lodge St Peter and two (Alexander and Charles) became honorary members).

### **James Burnes [IV] (1801-1862)**



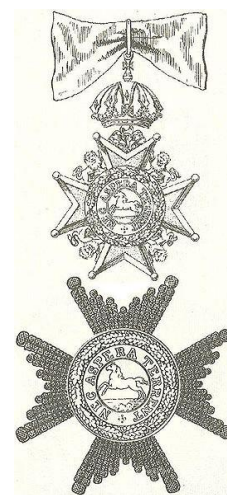
Born in Montrose in 1801 and oldest son of Provost James Burnes, he began his education at Montrose Academy, then went to study medicine at Edinburgh University and on to Guy's and St Thomas's Hospital in London.

With the help of his father's friend Joseph Hume, he signed up as an assistant surgeon with the East India Company and sailed for India in 1821, during the voyage he was accompanied by his younger brother Alexander, who was also enlisting as an ensign in a Company Regiment,.

In 1825 he was appointed Surgeon to the British residency in Cutch, followed the army into the Province of Scinde, and remained there for several months, while he was there he wrote 'A narrative

of a visit to the Court of Scinde', published 1831, comprising a sketch of the History of Cutch. ' He was forced by illness to leave in 1833 and embarked for Europe taking the difficult overland route through India and the Middle East to Malta, Sicily, Naples, Rome, Geneva and Paris.

When he returned to Britain he was created a doctor of Law at Glasgow University, a fellow of the Royal Society in London, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and was also presented to the Royal Court by his friend the Earl of Dalhousie, (Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland 1804-1805), he was created a Knight of the Royal Hanoverian Guelphic Order which gave him the title of 'Chevalier'



Insignia of the Royal Hanoverian Guelphic Order

He joined the 'Benevolent Lodge (E.C.) in India sometime prior to 1834, when he returned home to Montrose he was made an honorary member of Lodge St Peter (August 1834) this on the same day as his two younger brothers Charles and David joined the Lodge. Charles became a lieutenant in the 17<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry and was killed with his brother Alexander in Kabul in 1841 (see below) and David became a surgeon in the Royal Navy.



In April 1835 James became a member of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning No. 2, he witnessed the initiation of James Hogg the Ettrick Shepherd into the Lodge in May 1835.

In September 1836 James was elected Master of Lodge St Peter in Montrose although he only held this office for three months as the Grand Lodge of Scotland had appointed him the Provincial Grand Master of the Western Provinces of India. Early in 1838 he convened a meeting of this Provincial Grand Lodge under the Scottish Constitution. He appointed his Brother, Captain Alexander Burnes, Envoy to Kabul as one of the Wardens, also his youngest brother Lieutenant Charles Burnes, 17<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry. Other Provincial Grand Lodge office bearers were distinguished members of the civil and military administration in Bombay.

The most difficult and saddest period in his life in India was hearing of the news of the murders of his brothers Sir Alexander and Charles in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1841, this at the opening of the first Anglo/Afghan War. James withdrew into himself for many months

The first Scottish Lodges to be instituted in India did not happen until 1842/43 when first Lodge Hope, Karachi, Scinde was warranted in April 1842 and then in December 1842 the members of Lodge Perseverance under the English Constitution petitioned James Burnes to constitute them a Lodge under the Scottish Craft.

In January 1843 Burnes as Provincial Grand Master laid the foundation stone of the JAMSETJEE JEEJEEBHOY Hospital in Bombay, this ceremony led to the foundation of the first Lodge in India to receive *'under certain circumstances the native gentlemen of India'*. Up until this time only Christian, British and European men were admitted into the brotherhood of Freemasonry. Chevalier James Burnes, Scottish Provincial Grand Master changed all that by establishing Lodge Rising Star of Western India in December 1843 with Burnes as its first Master. At the first meeting of the lodge they admitted a 'Parsee' and a 'Mahommedan'. Others who joined in its early days were – a Zoroastrian, two Confucians and four Muslims – all meeting in 'Brotherly Love'.

Burnes was re-elected Master in 1844 and the Lodge struck a special medal. He also consecrated Lodge St Andrew's in the East at Poona in 1844 and they presented him with a *"Knights Cross of the Guelphic Order' enriched with brilliants, this as a mark of their esteem"*. In return Burnes presented them with a bible.

In 1846 he was promoted to the post of Superintending Surgeon of the Bombay Army, and Provincial Grand Master of the *"Three Presidencies in India & Aden"*.

The Indian Lodges on the departure of Chevalier Burns from India in 1849 struck medals for *"The encouragement of learning and good conduct in the Grant Medical College, the Byculla Schools in India and also Montrose Academy"*, Montrose Academy, James Burnes's old school in Scotland. Today, one hundred and sixty years after he left India the Burnes 'Dux' medal is still being presented at Montrose Academy.

Chevalier James Burnes died on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 1862 in Manchester

## James Burnes and Lodge Rising Star of Western India

Lodge Rising Star of Western India completed its first year successfully with 50 members on its roll, and resolved to reinstall Bro. Dr. James Burnes as its Master for the second time, which was done in the presence of two distinguished visitors from overseas, namely, The Marquis de Farriere La Voyar, French Ambassador enroute to China, and Viscount Sandall. The Lodge resolved in 1844 to commemorate its foundation, and to express its sense of gratitude to its founder, Bro. Dr. James Burnes by striking a Medal known as the Fundators or Burnes Medal.

It was struck in pure silver and executed by the famous artist R. Wyon, in London. On the obverse it bears a bust effigy of Right Worshipful Brother Dr. James Burnes, surrounded by the inscription "*Frat Insig et dilect Jacobus Burnes fundator*" meaning - James Burnes, Founder, distinguished and beloved brother. On the reverse are the full size effigies of Brothers Maneckji Cursetji and Mahomed Jaffer, each clothed in the full dress of their community, and with an apron and ribbon of the Order, and wearing the jewel of their office, and bearing a banner in their hand, standing near a pedestal on which are placed two volumes of the Sacred Law and a jewel, at the foot of which are the working tools, and behind which is a palm tree. On the pedestal appears the inscription "*Lodge Rising Star at Bombay*". On the rim is the inscription "*Founded for the reception of native gentlemen Dec 15. 1843*". The diameter of the medal is 45mm, and it weighs 37 grams. The Lodge has always highly prized this Medal and has presented it sparingly to great and distinguished Masons, who are not members of the Lodge, as a token of great esteem and respect of the Lodge for them.



Obverse view



Reverse view



The Burnes Medal or 'The Fundators Medal' as used by Lodge Rising Star of Western India

## On Display in Montrose Museum

3) Medallion of  
Lodge Rising Star of Bombay  
founded by  
James Burnes of Montrose in 1843

4) The Burnes Medal  
Awarded annually to the Dux  
of Montrose Academy.  
The Burnes Medal was one of 4 awards  
founded by the Masons of India  
in honour of James Burnes

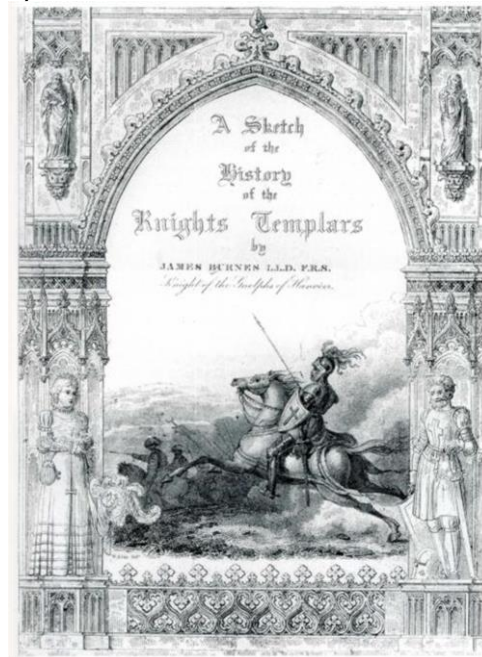


Dr James Burnes is credited with reviving the Masonic Order of Knights Templar when he published a '*Sketch of the History of the Knights Templar*' in 1837. This book was dedicated to 'His Royal Highness, Prince Augustus Frederic, Duke of Sussex, K.G. &c., P.R.S., Grand Prior of England.

For the first time the origin of the of the alleged Scottish connection between the Medieval order of the K.T. and Modern Freemasonry can be pinpointed with accuracy. James Burnes' book consists of 61 pages. An Introduction and Chapters on the 1) The Hospitallers, 2) The Knights Templar, 3)The Persecution of the Templars, 4) The Continuation of the Order, 5) The Knights Templar in Scotland and an Appendix containing the Bull of Pope Clement V and the obligations of the Masonic K.T. (both in Latin).

For the full text of the book and James Burnes involvement with reviving the Masonic Knights Templar can be found in Robert L.D. Cooper's excellent book - 'The Rosslyn Hoax'.

A sketch of the Knights  
Templar by James Burnes L.L.D.,  
F.R.S.





### Adam Burnes (1802-1872)



Writer in Montrose, brother to James (*Chevalier Dr James Burnes*), Adam, Alexander (*Sir Alexander or 'Bokhara Burnes – see info below*), Charles and David. Adam was the second son of Provost James Burnes. His Law office was at 186 High Street, and is still in existence today, now currently the office of a firm of local solicitors.

Adam became Procurator fiscal in Montrose and locally known as the 'poor mans' lawyer through his championing of the rights and freedoms of Montrose people to fish for trout and salmon in the River South Esk, also for their rights to shoot for geese, ducks etc in the local salt loch (an area that is now a wildlife conservation zone).

He was an active and long serving member of Lodge St Peter No. 120 and at various times Master of the Lodge.



## Sir Alexander Burnes (1805 – 1841)



Brother to Chevalier James Burnes, and like the rest of his brothers was educated at Montrose Academy, Alexander left Montrose a few weeks before his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1821, he sailed to London on a Dundee smack, there, his father's good friend, Joseph Hume M.P., an influential politician helped him to obtain a cadetship of infantry with the East India Company, Hume became his mentor – and banker. Whilst in London Alexander also studied the Hindu and Persian languages, in June of 1821, along with his older brother James, who had been appointed an assistant surgeon with the Army at Bombay, they sailed for India.

In India Alexander made steady progress in his military career, and with the right letters of introduction from his father's friends he made useful contacts with the civil and military leaders of the East India Company. He continued with his studies of the Hindu and Persian languages, always using them to communicate with his servants, he also learned the laws, manners, customs and religions of India, often dressing up in the manner and custom of the natives.

In 1822 Alexander, still only an Ensign, became an interpreter with the 11<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry stationed at Poona, later moving to Surat, with the rank of lieutenant and adjutant of the 21<sup>st</sup> regiment on 500-600 rupees per month (*approx 50-60 guineas*), by that time he had truly mastered the Indian and Persian languages and accompanied the army across the Indus river into the independent Province of Scinde.

Alexander also became interested in surveying the geography of the Indus valley, compiling maps of passes and routes, very useful for army use, his activities and knowledge earned him promotion to the Quarter Master General's department on 1000 rupees a month, in 1828 he became assistant Quarter master general of the Army. He volunteered to explore and map the entire Indus valley from the Punjab down to the Ocean, this he started in 1829, however he had to abandon this work half way through, due the local Indian leaders becoming suspicious of his activities and a possible expansion of British India into their independent lands.

His appetite for exploration and adventure had been whetted and he wanted to explore more into the unknown parts of India, in this he was supported by the Governor, Sir John Malcolm. Burnes now had great ambitions and plans, he admitted as much in a letter home to his parents in Montrose, he told them that he wanted to cross the Indus, pass through, Afghanistan, visit Bahlk, Bokhara, Samarkand and thence onto the Arabian and Caspian Seas and into Persia itself.

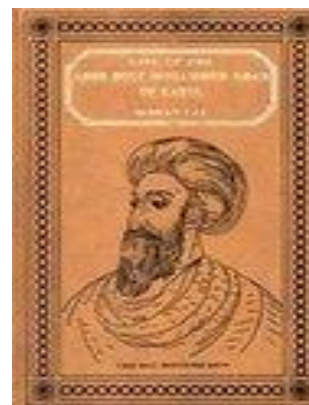
The British government in India had become worried about the territorial gains and the growing influence of Tsarist Russia into Afghanistan and threatening British India. Information, intelligence and knowledge of Russian activities in the area was desperately needed, also maps of the routes and passes and geography of the country. Burnes wrote to his sister in 1831 with the lines – *“the government have got frightened by the designs of Russia and desired some intelligence officer should be sent to acquire information on the countries bordering on the Oxus and Caspian”*.

Alexander was enthusiastic to return to Afghanistan, also he had a very personal ambition – *“to follow in the footsteps of another, Great, Alexander”*. His fluency with the languages, his knowledge of the customs and laws of India, and his ability to dress like a native, made him the ideal man to undertake this task. To conceal his true intentions and mission he was to use the excuse that he was

simply travelling home to Scotland and wanted to see and follow the route Alexander the Great had used and to see the wonders of the country, also, of course he had the added advantage of having the same first name, becoming known during his travels as 'Secunder' Burnes.

Alexander Burnes, native of Montrose, was one of the first Britons to play a part in a dangerous game between Britain and Russia in Afghanistan – 'The Great Game', a name first coined by Arthur Connolly an intelligence officer and then made famous by Rudyard Kipling. Also, another one of the great story writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was George Macdonald Fraser who used the adventures and exploits of Alexander Burnes in his 'Flashman' novels.

At the beginning of January 1832, dressed in native attire and accompanied by three companions, a young assistant surgeon and two native assistants, Alexander Burnes crossed the Indus River, over the frontier of British India and into Afghanistan. He found the Afghans cheery, simple minded, kind hearted, and hospitable, they had no hostility or resentment towards the British, he found Cabool (Kabul) 'truly a paradise' he was well received and made friends with the local chiefs, especially Dost Mahommed, the Ameer of Kabul. Leaving Kabul, he travelled into the Hindu-Kush to Balkh and then on to 'Holy Bokhara', after that to the Caspian Sea and onwards to Tehran in Persia.



When he returned to Bombay, he gave a report of his travels to the Governor-General Lord Auckland. His knowledge and experiences of Afghanistan were vital to Auckland's plans for central Asia, the 'Great Game' was in motion and Alexander Burnes became a key player.

Alexander Burnes was sent home to Britain in November 1833 and received a hero's welcome and received at the court of King William IV. He also published a book on his exploits – 'Travels to Bokhara', this earned him the title 'Bokhara Burnes'.

The narrative of his journey was immediately translated into French and German; he was elected a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, and of the Royal Geographical Society; and presented with the gold medal, and royal premium of fifty guineas, for "The Navigation of the Indus, and a Journey by Balkh and Bokhara across Central Asia." During a visit to Paris, he was welcomed with general enthusiasm as one of the most talented and adventurous of modern travellers and presented with the silver medal of the French Geographical Society.

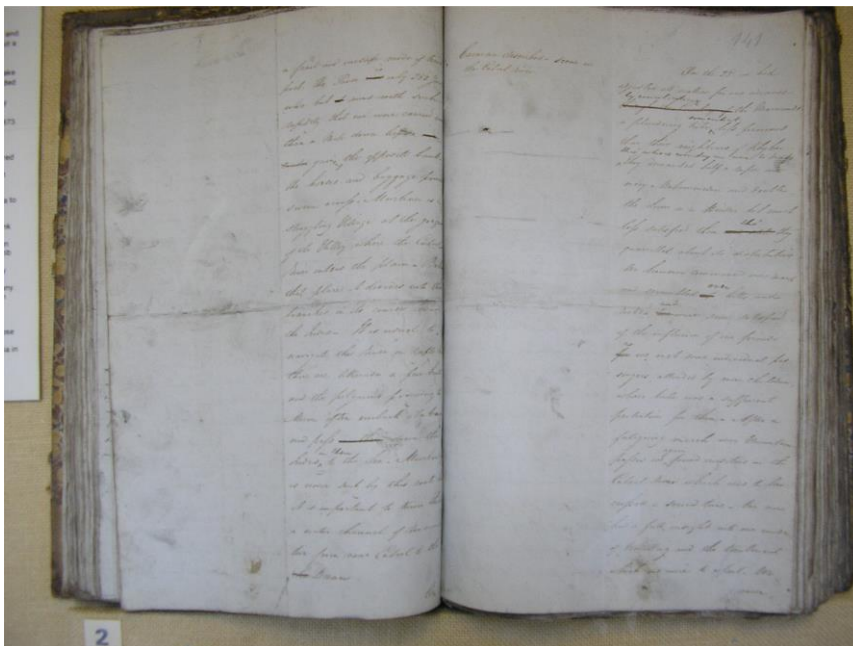
He returned to India in 1835 and by 1837 he had been knighted by King William IV for his services in Afghanistan and promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He was chosen by the Governor-General to go on another mission to Kabul to help establish a "commercial mission" in the country and to counter the Russian influence. There he found matters serious, his friend the Ameer, Dost Mahomet had been trying to maintain a position of independence from Persia and Russia. To complicate matters the East India Company had also sent a British Army into Afghanistan, to help with establishing this 'commercial' enterprise, and also to install a British supporting rival on the throne of Kabul – 'Shah Soojah' – and removing the reigning Ameer Dost Mahomod. This was a disastrous move by the British the Afghans rose in rebellion, besieged the British troops in Kabul. The house in which Alexander Burnes lived was surrounded and he along with his younger brother Charles and other aides were killed, the first victims in the first Anglo/Afghan War. The British force was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan, in doing so the entire force was progressively annihilated,



first at Gandamak and then in the Bolan Pass. Out of a force of approx 3,500 British and Indian soldiers and 12,000 camp followers, only one man, a doctor, made it back to the British Fort at Jellalabad.

Alexander Burnes first joined The Benevolent Lodge No 746 (E.C.), at some time between 1828 and 1834. When he returned home in Montrose in 1834, he was made an honorary member of Lodge St Peter No 120, and as mentioned above was made a Warden of the Provincial Grand Lodge of the Western Provinces of India in 1838.

Sir Alexander was never married and was survived by his parents and three brothers. Besides his "Travels into Bokhara," and several papers in the "*Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*," he was author of a work, entitled, "*Cabool; being a Narrative of a Journey to, and Residence in that City, in the Years 1836-7-8*," which was published after his death.

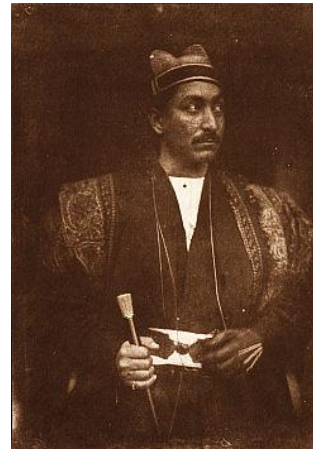


The Journals and papers of Alexander Burnes are now kept in the Montrose Museum

## Mohan Lal



During his many travels and exploits he was accompanied by his friend, secretary and companion Mohan Lal, a well-educated Indian who later converted to Islam. After the death of Sir Alexander and his brother Charles in Kabul, Mohun Lal had *'at the risk of his life entered Sir Alexander's mansion when it was in flames and secured his private papers'*, he then travelled to Scotland to return them to Burnes's family in Montrose. The newspaper report of the time said: *'He has a remarkably pleasant and highly intellectual cast of countenance and is dressed in a magnificent*



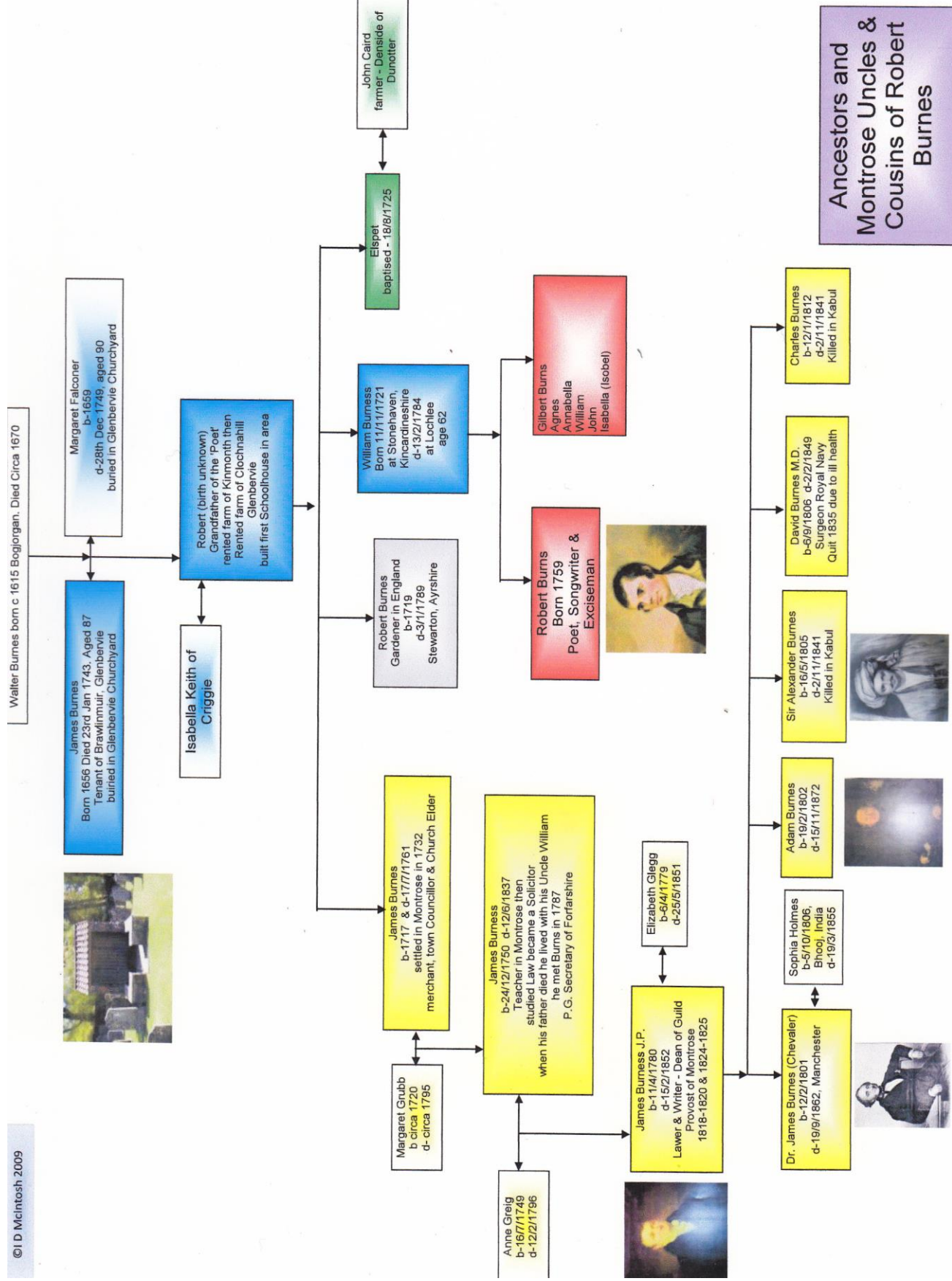
*Hindoo costume.'* It is because of this man that the papers and journals of Sir Alexander Burnes's adventures and exploits are available for historians and are at present lodged in the Montrose Museum.

This then is the story of the Mearns and Montrose family branches of Robert Burns, up to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. A part of the Robert Burns story which few people know about – or indeed realise exists, of where his father William Burness and his forebears came from, the lives they led, their exploits and adventures, and where they now lie in peace, and finally down to Alexander and Charles Burnes who died in the first British involvement in Afghanistan in 1841, a place where we are still involved 160 years on.

## In Conclusion

There are still many other inter-related connections, links, stories and Masonic involvements with the cousins of Robert Burns and other notable figures in Scottish and English Freemasonry which have come to light during the course of this research, and which have sown the seeds for future stories. I sincerely hope that the Robert Burns historians and fans find this part of the great story of Scotland's bard interesting and help to take that story back along the timeline to where his ancestors came from and out along the other branches of the family line.

# Ancestors and Montrose Uncles & Cousins of Robert Burnes



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Montrose Town Hall

Robert Burns in his Depute Master's Regalia



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*Grand Steward, - Grand Lodge of Scotland  
Honorary Assistant Grand Treasurer, Grand Lodge of Scotland  
Past Substitute Provincial Grand Master - Provincial Grand Lodge of Forfarshire  
Past Provincial Grand Secretary - Forfarshire  
Past Provincial Grand Treasurer - Forfarshire  
Past Master, Lodge Broughty Castle No. 486  
RWM – Lodge Discovery No.1789*

*Honorary Member Lodge Caledonian No. 254  
Honorary Member Lodge St Thomas of Aberbrothock No. 40  
Honorary Member Lodge St Andrew Lochilee No.282*